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CHAPTER XIV

Death, Burial and the Hereafter

If conditions permit, and water is available, a dead person is always washed, clothed in new linen, and then buried. If, as commonly occurs among the Badawin, these preliminaries are not possible, a hole is dug near the tent and the corpse buried with all speed. B 764

Women wash the bodies of women, and men those of men, never otherwise.

After a desert battle, the victors endeavour to bury their own dead but never those of the enemy, which are left to be eaten by the birds of the air and hyenas, as occurred in the battle of Ingair in 1929. The defeated party may, if they can, come and bury their dead at a later date—but this is of rare occurrence. B 764 727

Among the Badawin, mourning continues for three or four days, the women weeping and the men receiving guests who come to offer condolence.

On the evening of the death, a dinner must be given to the mourning guests, according to the means of the family.

Among Muslim townspeople generally (but not in Najd or Kuwait), a regular burial service, led by an *'alim* or priest, is held at the time of the burial, after which members of the family come to the grave every Friday and recite prayers or verses from the Qur'an. A 765

These holding the Wahhabi doctrines and more especially the Ikhwan, bury simply and quickly, believing that once a man is dead his body is of no further account. A tomb is therefore anathema to the Wahhabis and they tolerate no monuments of any sort.

Among Kuwait Shi'ahs, and also in Iraq, a death is followed by a period of three days' mourning of an official family nature (*fatiha*). Crowds gather daily to pay condolences and mourn, and on the third night a priest recites prayers and recitations. A well-to-do person gives free lunches to his neighbours each day, and a big dinner on the third night to relatives and special mourners. K 765

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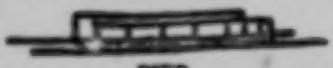
herdsmen. These and me the old man called around him, and after making the women prop him up in a sitting posture, he began to bid each person farewell in simple and quiet manner. He then addressed himself to me and asked me to give his salaams to Salim, Hillal al Mutairi, Shaikh Ahmad, Shaikh 'Abdullah al Salim, and others whom I did not know; he also sent messages to my wife and to my son Sa'ud. He then asked for a cup of coffee. After drinking it he lay down, closed his eyes and just ceased to breathe. His farewells, *balagh salami 'ala Hillal, wa 'ala Ahmad al Jabir*, etc., were simple and fine.

After his death Shaikh 'Abdullah al Salim, who was camped a mile off, sent his servants to wash and bury the old man. This was considered a good and generous act, for of course the women could not do this.

I was not a little moved by this simple death-bed scene of the desert, which reminded me of the Old Testament. No doubt Abraham died thus, sending messages to all and sundry up to the very last.

In Kuwait and in other Muslim towns, when a corpse is being carried to the cemetery for burial, any person lending a hand and assisting in shouldering the bier, a sort of open stretcher affair,



BIER

derives great merit. So at a funeral procession it is usual to see men changing places rapidly and often, each anxious to shoulder the bier for a short time.

Townswomen go off the deep end in truly alarming style when a relative dies. They tear their hair, beat their heads and breasts and rend their garments in a manner which is quite incomprehensible to us. This is partly due to the more emotional nature of the Arab woman, and partly because it is considered the right thing to do.

I have seen some women fall down and have to be carried away apparently bereft of all sense and reason, so grief-stricken have they been. When her brother-in-law was killed in a well whose sides fell in and crushed him (September 1933) our servant-girl Hamda even tore out her gold earrings and broke her gold bracelets and flung

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them away without knowing that she had done so. The neighbours' and onlookers' opinion of the bereaved woman rises in proportion to the amount of grief and emotion she displays.

The women of the desert, and especially those living in or on the borderland of Wahhabi-land (Sa'udi Arabia), act in exactly the reverse manner. I have already described the scene when Sárah bint Junaifir, who had just lost her small boy, greeted us with a laugh and smile as she pointed to the newly dug grave thirty feet away. It was not because she did not feel—she did keenly—but it was against the strict Wahhabi tenets to mourn her dead.

In the desert the grave is dug usually to a depth of four feet, not more. At the bottom a nook is hollowed out in the side of the grave to take the body, the idea being not to crush it with earth as the grave is filled in. The body having been placed in the nook, brushwood is next filled in up against the body, after which the grave is filled in with sand.

DESERT GRAVE

Should the Badawin family be able to afford it, they will, as I have said, wash the body and clothe it in a new piece of white cotton cloth. Should they be far from water, and unable to afford the shroud, they will just bury it unwashed or unshrouded. If a Mutawa'a (priest) is at hand, they will request him to hold a simple service over the dead; if not, no service is said.

No monuments nor even headstones are placed on graves in the desert, only a slight heap of earth, eight inches above the level of the ground. In Kuwait, and in Najd towns and villages generally, a rough piece of stone is placed at the head and feet, usually a piece of uncut coral or lump of lava. This not so much to mark the grave as to prevent other persons being buried on the same spot; for wind and rain rapidly wear away the low mounds of earth which mark a grave.

Once a person is buried in the desert, relatives never visit the grave. Wahhabi influence is so strong in Kuwait that no one ever goes to

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Unmarked Graves

visit the grave of a dead relative once he has been buried. Even the shaikhs' graves suffer like neglect, and in the great cemetery between the Naif gate and the Jahrah gate inside the wall, few can point out the graves of Shaikhs Mubarak, Jabir and Salim, the last three Rulers of the principality. There is nothing at all to distinguish their tombs from those of any man and woman who has been buried in the same place. It is interesting to know that Shaikhs Muhammad and Jarrah, slain by Shaikh Mubarak, lie in the *Safāt* or Market Square of Kuwait with nothing to indicate their burial place but a few stones flush with the ground.

The washing of dead bodies in Kuwait is carried out by a regular body-washer (*ghassāl*), male or female as the case may be, who is immediately sent for on a death taking place. This person is very business-like and gets to work at once. Persian (Shi'ah) men are washed in a room adjoining the mosque, while women are taken to special buildings provided for this purpose. The body-washer places the nude body on a large wooden table and pours water over it in quantities. Then with a gauntlet of coarse wool which he puts on his hands, he scrubs the corpse all over with soap and water, sousing it over and over again with copious douches of water. After this procedure he dries the body well, and dresses it up in its new white cotton shroud, or perhaps assists members of the family to do this. For preference the washing is done after dark, but this is not obligatory.

Among the Badawin when a woman's husband dies, the widow keeps herself shut up in her tent, and wears a green undergarment. She goes out only when all strange men are out of sight; she must cover her hands and feet with a sort of glove and sock when she moves with her family; this is known as *Addād* or *Addām* (*taḥaddād* or *taḥaddām*—she is mourning).

OTHER INTERESTING POINTS CONNECTED WITH A BADAWIN DEATH

(α) In the desert water is usually dropped into the mouth of a person about to die.

(β) The eyes of the dead person are not closed as in the West.

(γ) The Badawin greatly dislikes having to bury his own dead. If he can, he will get some non-Badawin, a settled Arab for instance, if one is

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763 764 at hand, to do the work for him. Similarly, to touch a dead body is revolting to him.

(d) A woman's grave must be deep enough to hide her breasts if she were placed upright.

(e) A man's grave need be only 4 feet deep, i.e. up to a man's middle, or his knees, if there is no time to bury him properly.

(f) No woman ever accompanies a dead man's funeral procession, and as few persons as possible attend any actual burial. This is unlike the *hadhar* (town) custom, when friends all go to see a man buried, and vie with each other to carry the body, if only for a few seconds.

765 (g) Up to the third day after a man's death his friends visit his son and console with him by quoting various regular forms of comforting phrases,* such as: "He was a good man, and this has happened from Allah." "It happens to all men and to all people born of woman." "May Allah replace him who has passed away." If a man has lost his son the words "may Allah grant you another son in his place", etc., *Allah yikhlif 'alaikum* are used. The man condoled with will reply, "Thanks be to Allah, Allah is omnipotent".

The Badawin's idea of Heaven or Paradise is simple and pleasing and I have often discussed this subject with him.

772 775 Paradise means to him a land where it is always spring (*rabi'*), with plentiful and permanent green grazing (*'ashab*), water flowing in abundance from springs and small rivulets, a place where no unpleasant things are met with such as are prevalent in this world (hunger, lack of water, dried-up pasture, camel disease, etc.).

In Paradise all a man's tribe live together in pastures green, he meets all his friends and relations. No one grows old—all live for ever. They marry and give in marriage, and every person has an extra large tent, large herds of camels and sheep and many children. Should a person have lost children in this world, he or she will meet them in Paradise, grown to the age they would have been if they had lived, and the children will welcome and greet their parents as at the end of a journey.

I once asked Amsha, wife of Salim al Mussiyin, if she would be Salim's wife in heaven, as she was here. She replied that she would know him and her children, and live close to him, and visit her children

* Such formulae of condolence are: (1) *Allah i 'awdum ajrikum* (when grown up boy died, such as a son); (2) *Allah yahdin ajrikum* (for child's death); (3) *Allah i 'awdum ajrikid* (for women).